



Frequently Asked Questions Provider Lookup Web site

Overview

The Health Professional Quality Assurance Division launched a Web site that provides easy access to information on the 260,000 health care professionals in the state. The Web site provides the health care provider's birth date and license status, including any current restrictions or disciplinary actions. If action has been taken against a health care professional since July 1998, the Web site displays the information and allows copies of legal documents to be printed. Even partial entries will result in a listing of health care professionals to choose from. If a practitioner has more than one credential to practice in Washington, that will be shown.

Q. What information is available about a health care provider?

- Birth year
- Credential number
- Type of credential(s)
- Whether the health care professional's license status is active, deceased, expired, inactive, military, revoked, suspended, unlicensed, or retired
- The date when they first became credentialed
- Expiration date of credential
- Last renewal date
- Restrictions or disciplinary actions
- Copies of legal documents issued after July 1998

Q. How do I find information about restrictions or disciplinary actions before 1998?

If there are restrictions or disciplinary actions prior to 1998, it will be noted on the practitioner's page. Information on those items can be obtained by calling the Customer Service Center at 360-236-4700.

Q. Can I find out how many complaints have been filed against a health care provider on Provider Lookup?

A majority of complaints received are not a violation of law and cannot be acted upon. Only those complaints that result in action are shown on Provider Lookup. Complaints that have not resulted in action are public information and are available by calling the Customer Service Center at 360-236-4700.

Q. Does Provider Lookup have malpractice or criminal conviction information?

Health care professional malpractice settlements and criminal convictions against a health care professional are reported to the Department of Health. They may serve as the basis

for restrictions or disciplinary actions taken against the practitioner. Only the resulting actions are available in Provider Lookup, beginning in July 1998. The specific information regarding malpractice or criminal charges is not available.

Q. Why isn't a health care provider's address shown? How will I know I'm inquiring about the right provider?

Health care providers give a licensing address that may or may not be their work location; it may be their residential address. In accordance with law, we cannot disclose a residential address. However, in the future the Web site will provide county information.

Q. Does Provider Lookup show specialty information (e.g. a physician is an orthopedic specialist)?

Washington State does not credential health care providers by specialty with the exception of Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioners (ARNPs). There is no specialty information shown in Provider Lookup, but ARNP specialty information will be provided by the Customer Service Center at 360-236-4700.

Q. If I want to find the best practitioner, will I be able to make that distinction from the Web site?

The Web site will tell you the license status and any restrictions and/or disciplinary actions against the health care provider's credential. DOH cannot make recommendations on which practitioner you should see.

Q. What is an informal complaint resolution versus a formal disciplinary action?

Informal complaint resolutions called Stipulations to Informal Disposition (STIDs) are used primarily as education tools with practitioners. They may require additional education, reports to be written or other actions by the practitioner that are meant to be corrective in nature rather than disciplinary.

Formal disciplinary action may limit a health care professional's practice and is used in more serious cases.

Q. Why are informal complaint resolutions (Stipulations to Informal Disposition STIDs) shown on Provider Lookup?

This information, like other information in Provider Lookup is public. It is reported to the national databanks and can only be seen on Provider Lookup if the practitioner's name or credential number is entered into the system.

Q. What does the Narrative Description on Provider Lookup represent?

The narrative statement refers to the Uniform Disciplinary Act (UDA) law that the practitioner allegedly violated. These are statutory references and cannot be changed unless they do not reflect what was in the Order. Orders issued after July 1, 1998 are on-line and can be viewed. You will find the same language in the on-line copy of the Order.

If the Order is a STID, the language will be found in the Stipulation section. In other types of Orders, the language can be found in the Conclusions of Law section.

Q. When I view the legal documents on Provider Lookup, why is some information blanked out/not visible?

DOH has a legal responsibility to withhold information that is protected by law. Each legal document is reviewed, and the information that cannot be disclosed is blanked out (redacted). There is a cover sheet that accompanies each document. The cover sheet refers to the specific law protecting the information that has been taken out.

Q. I just checked on my health care practitioner and realize that I should file a complaint. How do I do that?

From Provider Lookup's home page (upper right corner), you can click back to the Health Professions Quality Assurance (HPQA) home page. Under "Site Directory," click on "Complaint Information" to get the forms you'll need to fill out. You may also call the Customer Service Center at 360-236-4700 to file a complaint.

Q. Does this Web site serve as a primary source for verification?

Yes, the Web site serves as the primary source for verification of health care professionals licensed, certified or registered and meets the requirements of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).

Q. Doesn't the disclosure of my name, birth date and credential number violate my privacy under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations.

This information can be publicly disclosed and is not a violation of federal rules because the regulation of health care professionals is exempted from the rule; HPQA is not a "covered entity." The information is an identifier for employers, insurance companies and verification services that will be relying on the Web site for information. It also helps the general public in distinguishing one practitioner from another. We cannot, by law, disclose social security numbers or address information as identifiers.

Q. Why are the complaints not shown? How can I get that information?

Up to 80 percent of complaints are either outside our jurisdiction, below the level that we can investigate, or if investigated do not result in evidence of a violation. For those reasons, we do not display complaint information on Provider Lookup.

Q. How many health care providers are disciplined per year?

Most health care professionals in Washington state follow the rules and are safe. Of the 260,000 health care professionals credentialed, only 934 professionals per year (average) have informal actions or disciplinary actions taken against their credential.